

State Department Official Speaks at the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy Conference



Washington DC - May 5th 2009, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Madelyn E. Spirnak spoke at the Center for Study of Islam and Democracy's 10th Annual Conference, outlining the U.S. Government's current policies related to the Middle East, North Africa, and Muslims all over the world. Ms. Spirnak oversees the Middle East Partnership Initiative as well as regional public diplomacy and press issues.

Ms. Spirnak spoke extensively on the new dialogue-based approach to working with the region as expressed by President Obama and Secretary Clinton: "President Obama has made clear his commitment to pursue a deep and positive dialogue with Muslims around the world based on mutual respect and in support of our mutual interests.... He spoke of new partnerships on behalf of education, health care, and opportunity in his speech before the Turkish Parliament. Secretary Clinton has spoken of a

new diplomacy powered by partnership, pragmatism, and principle and the importance of using all of the tools at our disposal to achieve our national interests, but also to implement policies that will have a positive effect on the lives of people throughout the world.... The Secretary has made it clear that public diplomacy lies at the heart of America's smart power. True public diplomacy is not simply lecturing other people. True public diplomacy is about engagement – it is actually having a real dialogue – and listening."

On promotion of democracy and greater freedoms, Ms. Spirnak reflected on America's own culture as basis for the Department of State's approach: "America's promise of acceptance and tolerance – both politically and religiously – are principles we can all be proud of. It is therefore a natural extension that in our diplomatic exchanges and dialogues with people around the world we will continue to encourage the development of civil society and democratic and representative governments.... We have at our disposal various diplomatic and programmatic tools that are presently benefiting or will benefit those in the Middle East and North Africa who are seeking a more open and progressive political environment. Through partnership, we want to work with the people of the region to create new political, economic, and educational opportunities. We fully understand that political, social, and economic progress must be led by those in the region, but these efforts merit strong U.S. support through both diplomacy and resources."

Ms. Spirnak also highlighted some of the ways in which the U.S. is working with local partners striving to make positive changes in their societies. "Through our assistance programs, we are rebuilding Iraq and supporting the transition to stability and democracy; helping Palestinians realize a two-state solution with Israel – living side by side in peace; promoting democratic reforms; expanding education to give youth job skills and roles in society; and supporting free trade agreements, infrastructure and business development.... The Middle East Partnership Initiative assists efforts to expand political participation, strengthen civil society and the rule of law, empower women and youth, create educational opportunities, and foster economic reform throughout the Middle East and North Africa. In support of these goals, MEPI works with non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and academic institutions, as well as governments, contributing over \$530 million to more than 600 projects in 17 countries and territories since its establishment. Through direct support to local organizations in the Middle East and North Africa, MEPI is strengthening the sustainability and capacity of those who serve as the region's most dedicated and successful agents of change. MEPI has funded projects implemented by more than 250 such organizations working to advance reform in their home countries. And approximately half of MEPI's projects are grants made directly to these local organizations."

Full speech is available on the MEPI Alumni Network's website: <https://mepialumni.state.gov/csld>

FEATURES

2009 Legal and Business Fellowship Program Launches



A group of 22 young professional women from the Middle East and North Africa – Algeria, Bahrain, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Palestinian Territories and Yemen – arrived in the U.S. to participate in the 2009 Legal and Business Fellowship Program (LBFP). The participants are professional women between 22 and 32 years of age. They were selected through a merit-based competitive process and demonstrated strong academic backgrounds, relevant work experience, excellent mastery of English, and leadership skills. Over 400 applications were received for this year's program which is implemented by AMIDEAST.

The 2009 LBFP consists of a four-week executive training program at the Wharton School in the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, followed by three month professional fellowships in large U.S. companies and top-tier law firms in Atlanta, Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Jose. Participants work full-time and gain hands-on experience in areas such as accounting, finance, human resources, information technology, financial analysis and legal research. The company or law firm will also assign each woman a mentor for the duration of her fellowship.

This year's program kicked off with a series of orientation meetings in Washington D.C. including a lunch at the Department of State with officials from the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau. The keynote speaker at the luncheon was [American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee](#) President and former U.S. Congresswoman Mary Rose Oakar.

Bahraini Women Pledge TV Rights Push



A series of public service announcements by women's groups could soon be aired on national television in Bahrain following a three-week workshop in which they were taught how to use computer technology to write, film and edit video messages.

Representatives of seven Bahraini women's organizations have written, directed and filmed a series of 30-second public service announcements, which were first screened on May 3, 2009, at the Gulf Hotel. The announcements aim to raise awareness of women's issues such as access to technology, participation in next year's national elections, domestic abuse, illiteracy and youth development.

The workshop was organized by the New York-based Barefoot Workshop, along with the Bahrain-based Smart Coaching and Research Centre. The project is funded by MEPI.

Organizers hope they will also be broadcast on national television, posted on the Internet and even distributed to mobile phones. "We hope to support societies in Bahrain, particularly women's societies, to raise awareness about various issues faced by them," said program director Alison Fast. "We hope that this will be the first of a series of movements that will create awareness about the issues present within the society.

"Each women's society we have worked with has its own agenda for moving forward and has been equipped to spread public service announcements through the channels they choose and to the audience that they are aimed at." The societies hope their messages will reach wider audience as possible thanks to advanced technology. "We are hoping to be able to air the announcements on television where the majority of people can have access to them," said Ms. Fast.

Participating organizations included the Bahrain Young Ladies Association, Bahraini Society for Women's Development, Bahrain Women's Association, Al Reef Young Lady Society, Hamad Town Women's Society, Awal Women's Society, Smart Coaching and Research Centre and the Batelco Care Centre for Family Violence Cases.

U.S. Ambassador to the UAE Addresses Conference Focusing on MEPI's Women in Technology Project



U.S. Ambassador Richard G. Olson, Jr. addressed the opening of a conference focused on private-public partnerships and women's e-literacy, held in Abu Dhabi on April 29. The event focused specifically on the success of the MEPI-funded Women in Technology (WIT) project in the UAE. The project, led by the U.S.-based Institute of International Education (IIE), works in partnership with the UAE's General Women's Union and the Western Region Development Council, as well as the Microsoft Corporation, to provide substantial capacity building to women's organizations to expand their reach, sustainability and ability to serve women.

In his remarks to the 100 people in attendance, Ambassador Olson commended the "efforts made by the General Women's Union, under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima, to empower UAE women and expand their participation in the workforce and civil society." Following the Ambassador's comments, Microsoft presented plaques of appreciation to the U.S. State Department and other project partners for the commitment they have demonstrated in supporting the WIT project. Later in the afternoon, a panel of experts, which included WIT Project Director Heather Ramsey from IIE and Basimah Rowe from the MEPI Regional Office in Abu Dhabi, discussed a number of issues related to the importance of private-public sector cooperation in local development, particularly in developing vital job skills for marginalized sectors of society.

The WIT project in the UAE has partnered with four centers in the Western region of Abu Dhabi to support women's ongoing personal and professional growth, and there are plans to establish additional partners in the Northern Emirates very soon. WIT received official accreditation from the UAE's Ministry of Education in 2008, which enables it to provide a certification upon completion of the course. By 2010, the project aims to train more than 700 women in the UAE in entrepreneurship, professional development skills, and – through Microsoft's Unlimited Potential Curriculum – coursework in basic computer literacy and information technology. To date, WIT has trained more than 6,000 women in nine countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa. It has generated more than US \$350,000 in revenue for its partner organizations through course fees and has enabled the centers to employ, train, cover overhead costs and offer scholarships to the poorest women in the communities that WIT serves.

Two Hundred New Computer Skills Project Graduates in Jordan



The Women in Technology project in Jordan hosted a graduation ceremony on April 30 for more than 200 women who recently finished computer skills training coursework in the governorates in Madaba, Zarqa, Amman, and Mafrq. Princess Sumaya Bint Al Hassan of Jordan attended the event and presented a speech commending the women for their hard work and efforts to complete the program. Nicole Manapol, representing MEPI's implementing partner, the Institute of International Education, and U.S. Embassy Cultural Affairs Officer, Jennifer Rasamimanana, also spoke at the event to highlight WIT's success in Jordan and throughout the region.

FEATURES

Ministry and MEPI-Supported Project Creates Child-Centered Classrooms in Oman



Improving student learning through active participation is at the core of the Child Centered Classrooms Methodology (CCCM) project - a project introduced to Omani schools under MEPI's Partnership Schools Program.

The Sultanate of Oman's Education Ministry has committed to raising education standards to a level that will enable Oman's children to perform more effectively in schools and eventually in the marketplace. CCCM enables students to direct their own learning, a critical capability in an ever changing technology-based world.

Implemented by Creative Associates International, CCCM introduces new approaches to teaching and learning and emphasizes development of students' critical thinking skills. This methodology is widely regarded as a successful example of how to improve education quality and prepare students from first to fourth grades to be self-directed in their educational development. "With the old way of teaching, the teacher's role was bigger, meaning the teacher was the one who controlled the educational process," said Rabab Mohammed Al Ajmi, a grade four science teacher at Al Bustan School. But CCCM "prepares the student to rely upon himself in the learning process and this helps students to develop and promote self-learning in the future."

Initially piloted in 2004 in 20 schools in Oman's capital, Muscat, the CCCM project has had a positive impact on student achievement in these schools, creating a demand for wider project implementation. This year, the project extended to include 16 new schools throughout the country. The Oman Ministry of Education continues working with the Creative Associates team to scale up and institutionalize CCCM practices in schools and teacher training institutions.

CCCM activities and resources in these new schools were funded by the Omani Ministry of Education with MEPI's support focused on institutional capacity development within the MOE achieved through training and policy development initiatives. Today, 1,900 supervisors, school principals have been trained, and teachers child-centered methodologies have reached more than 12,000 students.

MEPI-Funded Project Advocates for a Violence-Free Environment



The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Beirut has re-launched the Youth in Action Project, a MEPI-funded project that addresses the problem of violence through a comprehensive approach that emphasizes raising awareness among youth in general and their active involvement in advocating for a violence-free environment. The Youth in Action project targets students in the 10th and 11th grade in public and private schools in Greater Beirut. The project consists of awareness-raising sessions, the election of youth volunteers and advocates, the youth advocates training workshop, the creation of "Youth in Action" daughter associations and networking through a virtual forum. The program objectives are to build leadership skills among youth and increase their knowledge of human rights, impact of violence and conflict resolution strategies.

The Youth in Action Project was first launched in the academic year 2007-2008 during which it reached out to around 600 students, aged 15 to 17 in six private and public schools, thirty of whom were elected by their fellow students and trained in conflict resolution practices and negotiation skills. The project's objective was to foster continuing advocacy by youth, in their respective schools and communities, for a life free of violence for all through the formation of Youth in Action Clubs.

In the new academic year 2008/2009, YWCA identified six new private and public schools from different areas of Lebanon. Around 500 students were reached through the awareness sessions implemented.

FEATURES

Order in the Court! WILpower is in Session Again...



What happens when you bring 21 young women lawyers together for a week of legal training? The answer is: networking, skill building, hard work, and a dose of fun. WILpower, MEPI's new Women in Law training program, implemented by the Academy for Educational Development, held its second regional conference at the Dead Sea, Jordan from May 2-7. The young women lawyers, all under the age of 35, traveled from the West Bank, Lebanon, Kuwait, and the UAE to take part in the six-day event, where they were joined by several Saudi participants sponsored by Freedom House – three of whom are part of the country's first law school graduating class of women. The workshop featured innovative leadership exercises that challenged the women to think creatively, as well as business training curriculum developed by the Cisco Entrepreneurship Institute and taught by experts from Jordan's Queen Rania Center for Entrepreneurship. A panel of Jordanian experts from various civil society organizations also engaged with the women to discuss their work in legal networks and advocacy for women's and children's rights.

The highlight of the week, however, was a two-day moot court competition designed to build the women's technical legal skills, particularly research and oral argumentation. The women were divided into seven teams, each of which was made up of participants from different countries, and were asked to prepare legal briefs and testimony in a mock trial of famed Egyptian author May Ziadeh. None of the women had ever participated in this type of activity before. The presentations were judged by a legal panel comprised of keynote speaker, Palestinian lawyer Youla Haddadin, from the Women's Rights and Gender Unit at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland, as well as a Jordanian lawyer and a senior-ranking Jordanian judge. The two winning teams were awarded a grand prize trip to Washington, D.C. to be taken this fall, where they will tour the U.S. Supreme Court, visit several U.S. law schools, and meet with several private-sector legal firms in the area.

The women were thrilled with the opportunity to take part in this interactive and dynamic training. In addition to enhancing their leadership, legal, and business skills, they left with new friendships, a stronger sense of confidence, and even greater enthusiasm for planning their upcoming local workshops this summer.

The regional conference was covered by local and regional media including an extended article titled ["Arab Sisters in Law Meet to Hone Skills"](#) in UAE's *The National* Newspaper.



EVENTS & NEWS

Did You Know?

According to [The Brookings Institution](#), more than 50% of the population in the Middle East region is under the age of 24.

MEPI is committed to empowering youth through projects that help young people become actively engaged citizens, obtain a quality education, gain employable skills, and access professional development opportunities.

MEPI's civic education projects and training in leadership and advocacy skills empower youth to be advocates on behalf of their communities and to undertake civic duties and responsibilities. Professional development and education-for-employment projects support the integration of young people as contributing members to their economies. Media projects allow young people to harness their creativity and develop new media opportunities, such as blogs and podcasts. All of these projects support young people as stakeholders in society and encourage their active participation in their communities.

Video Democracy Challenge Voting is Open

The Department of State and its partners announced the eighteen finalists for the Democracy Video Challenge, an online video competition that asked participants to complete the phrase, "Democracy is..." Public voting to select the six winners is now open (www.youtube.com/democracychallenge) and will continue until midnight June 15th (EST).

The finalists, chosen from among a pool of more than 900 entries from 95 countries, represent Brazil, Cote d'Ivoire, Germany, India, Iran, Japan, Nepal, Philippines, Poland, Serbia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, the United States, Uzbekistan, and Zambia. These videos provide an array of voices and visions about democracy from around the world. The finalists were selected by an independent jury,

Six winners - one each from the Western Hemisphere, Europe, Middle East/North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Central Asia and East Asia/Pacific - will be announced mid-June 2009.

MEPI in the Press and Publications

Democracy Promotion Under Obama: Lessons from the Middle East Partnership Initiative - *Brookings Institution*
http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/05_democracy_promotion_wittes.aspx

Advocacy Program Trains Pro-Democracy Activists from Middle East, North Africa - *VOA News*
<http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-05-11-voa17.cfm>

U.S. State Department Official Encourages Dialogue With Muslim World - *All Africa*
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200905130013.html>

Daibis Opens Workshop Day for Palestinian Business Women - *WAFA*
<http://english.wafa.ps/?action=detail&id=12688>

Qatari Businesswomen Eye Expanded Regional Role - *Gulf Times*
http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=288775&version=1

FTA Spurs Bahrain and US Trade to \$1.3 Billion - *Gulf Daily News*
<http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=249877>

Cisco Entrepreneur Institute Helps Middle East Female Lawyers Become Successful Entrepreneurs - *AME Info*
<http://www.ameinfo.com/194873.html>

Take Advantage of FTA: US Envoy - *Times of Oman*
<http://www.timesofoman.com/echoice.asp?detail=25032&rand=E5jsPVWdbm4nIOd61fMZZ5W3ni>

Tech Workshop Helps Women - *The National*
<http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090430/NATIONAL/704299853/-1/NEWS>

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